

# Launching Africa's information highway

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has launched a program to significantly improve data management and dissemination in Africa. The ultimate goal of the program is to facilitate wider public access to official statistics and to support countries in their efforts to improve data quality and dissemination for better policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation.

The program was launched in November 2012 as part of the bank's broader statistical capacity building program in Africa. Work has been going on concurrently in several African countries and institutions and has been completed in the following 13 countries and one pan-African institution: Cape Verde, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and the African Union Commission. The plan is to finalise the development and installation of data portals in all 54 African countries and 16 sub-regional and regional agencies by the end of July 2013.

## Establishing data links

The program involves the development and installation of common IT platforms in all 54 countries and 16 sub-regional and regional organisations in Africa. The aim is to establish live data links between the bank and National Statistical Agencies, Central Banks and Line Ministries in African countries, on one hand, and linking the countries with each other and with other external development partners, on the other. This will facilitate easy data exchange, validation, analysis and dissemination using common international standards and guidelines. This approach will not only ease access to statistical data and metadata in African countries, it will also help to improve the quality of the country data by making it more internationally comparable, harmonized, meaningful, and ultimately more usable.

The IT platform being deployed in Africa also features a data submission tool for seamless transfer of country data to the AfDB's statistical portal. In this context, the AfDB Statistics Department has teamed up with the IMF Statistics Department to help countries prepare National Summary Data Pages, as part of the preparation for subscribing to the enhanced IMF Special Data Dissemination Standards (SDDS-Plus).

The bank has also partnered with the European Union to provide easy access to agricultural data and to tools for simulating various agricultural policy alternatives. The data submission facility will position the AfDB as the key depository for development data in Africa and the hub for data-sharing with other international development partners. This will also significantly reduce the data reporting burden of African countries since data will now only need to be uploaded once into the AfDB system and then shared with various development partners.

This AfDB initiative provides a unique opportunity for African countries to take the lead in implementing statistical standards at a regional level and make their data easily accessible through a common platform. It will also significantly revolutionise

data management and dissemination in Africa, and reposition the continent for more effective participation in the global information economy.

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